



By Tim Chitwood

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Georgia Congressman Sanford Bishop, whose district includes the Blakely peanut plant at the center of a nationwide scandal involving its sending salmonella-tainted products, issued a statement today regarding the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation's hearing on the peanut recall.

In excerpts from the statement sent to that subcommittee, Bishop writes that he also feels "the outrage, anger and concern" caused by the company's conduct, adding, "It is my firm belief that any company that willfully and knowingly places unsafe products in the market place that ultimately contributes to numerous illnesses and the loss of innocent lives, should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law!"

But the resulting publicity is hurting innocent peanut farmers and manufacturers of peanut products, Bishop says:

"Southwest Georgia, which includes my entire district, is the number one peanut producing region in the country! Literally, thousands of my constituent's livelihoods are directly or indirectly impacted by this peanut recall.... American food manufacturers use almost 2 billion pounds of peanuts a year in a wide range of products, including snack nuts, peanut butter, and confectionary products. This includes more than 1 billion pounds of peanut butter per year.

"Peanut Corporation of America's Blakely facility only processed an estimated 1.8 percent of all peanuts processed in the United States. It is only natural that consumers are confused about which peanut products are safe and can be eaten. It's completely understandable. But people should remember that they can still enjoy peanut butter – here's what they need to know.

"Major national brands of jarred peanut butter found in grocery stores are not affected by this recall. In fact, the vast majority of products that contain peanuts and peanut butter are not affected. I am reminded that last summer, Georgia tomato farmers were unfairly linked to another food safety emergency, when the FDA initially linked a salmonella outbreak to tainted tomatoes — only to later discover the source of the disease was peppers.

"In the meantime, our tomato market shriveled in Georgia. Tomato farmers left the fruit to rot in boxes and on the vine. In the end, the state agriculture department estimated Georgia tomato growers had lost about \$30 million.

"In that instance, the FDA got it wrong. And it is important to remember moving forward that it is

not just the manufacturer in this instance who may be culpable, but also those at the federal and state level, who are responsible for ensuring the safety of our nation's food supply."